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ABSTRACT

This case study documents the changes one urban secondary school English teacher made to improve the quality of her students' educational experiences, noting the impact of her school's participation in the Coalition of Essential Schools. The first section describes her transition from being a good conventional teacher to being a teacher-as-coach, examining her changing role in the classroom. The second section presents one day in two reformed, 10th-grade English classrooms, also describing a team planning session. The third section presents the teacher's reflections on pedagogical change, explaining how she adapted the nine Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools. This section also looks at factors that supported change (e.g., team collaboration and allocation of time); factors that hindered change (e.g., personal fears and various personal and structural transitions); and motivations to continue (e.g., student response and expansion of the teacher's own knowledge and understanding). The nine Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools are attached. (SM)

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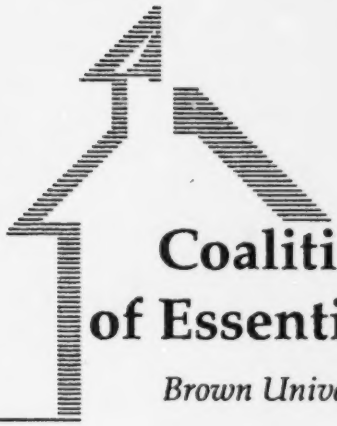

Coalition
of Essential Schools

Brown University

A Feeling of Uneasiness

An English Teacher in the Midst of Change

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STUDIES ON TEACHER CHANGE (No. 1)

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PART I

From "Conventional" Teacher to Teacher-as-Coach

"Twenty to eight. Good! We've got plenty of time." Elizabeth Ehler gripped the steering wheel of her large van with determination. I could see that she was concentrating, thinking hard as we sped down open roads that divided the rolling fields of the Ozark foothills. We were on our way to Newline High School, where she had worked all of her fourteen years as a teacher.

"Now where was I? Oh, yes, you asked me what happened to prompt my changing as a teacher. I think it came from within. For a long time, I had had a feeling of uneasiness. Even before Phil Manor, our former principal, started talking about the Coalition of Essential Schools,[1] or before I met Ted Sizer, I had this feeling that we'd done too much of the same stuff. Something was wrong. Things just were not right in my own classroom. My students were asking me, 'Why do you always stand up here and say, "This is important"? *Why* is this important?' They were frustrated and bored. And I felt it. It was hard to live with that feeling of — of uneasiness." She was quiet for a moment, moving back into the midst of those unsettling feelings.

Originally, Elizabeth had been hired at Newline to teach French and English, which she had done for ten years. Three years ago, she had volunteered to join an experimental interdisciplinary team, four teachers who were to start a school-within-a-school serving eighty students. Inspiration for their experiment had come from the Coalition of Essential Schools. Their project had come a long way in four years. The original name, School-Within-a-School, had been dropped. A second team of teachers and students had been added. The first set of students had graduated after three years in the program, and the original team was beginning with a second set of kids.

In those three years, Elizabeth's role as a teacher had changed significantly. I had come to join Elizabeth for a week to watch her classes and to see if, together, we could figure out what changes she had made and what the implications of those changes were for her students and her colleagues.[2]

Elizabeth spoke softly, with a lilting, gentle Southern drawl. The softness of her voice belied her intensity, but the rapidity with which she spoke dispelled any question about it. She had brown curly hair, beautiful olive skin, and deep brown eyes. Her gaze was very direct, forthright and clear. She stood about five feet six inches tall and was dressed in a long blue-jean dress and short boots — youthfully fashionable. She had a marvelous sense of humor and was constantly poking fun at herself.

Elizabeth had been married for fifteen years and had three sons. Her husband ran a successful business from their eighty-acre farm. Elizabeth laughed easily as she described the gargantuan task of shuttling three boys to their various sporting events, lessons, and schools — a full-time job in itself. Her family life was very important to her, and the juggling of home and career provoked a number of challenges. Frustration showed as she mentioned that her husband often commented that she expended the best of her energy at school; he would have liked her to stay home. She didn't think that would be possible for her, nor could she see how she might do less as a teacher. "You can't do it half way! I can't, anyway."

A Very Good "Conventional" Teacher

As we sped along past stubble-strewn fields and occasional farmhouses, I asked Elizabeth about the kinds of changes she had made as a teacher. To clarify her changing role, she launched into a description of herself as a very good "conventional" teacher during the first nine years of her career.[3]

"A typical lesson in French — we would go over the chapter vocabulary. I would say the word to the students and they would repeat it. I usually had a group of thirty or so students. It was my show; I did most of the work and at the end of the class, I was very tired because I had done all of the speaking. I worked hard to generate interesting, active lessons that moved along and that incorporated a variety of different types of activities. They would, on command, repeat for me. We would

do vocabulary, and then we would cover a certain number of pages, say 1 through 5, in the book. That work usually included reading passages in French, studying a little French history, or looking at another grammatical form. Then I would assign seat work, exercises A, B, and C. I moved about the room to answer their questions and to give them individual attention — as much as was possible. Occasionally I asked questions: 'What is *je suis*?' Sometimes we played games. Oftentimes I brought in little bits of French culture. Then, when they started the seat work, it was my time to go back to my desk. Because I have always liked teenagers, my room was always a comfortable place to be."

Elizabeth went on to articulate her early philosophy. She worked hard to maintain an orderly classroom because she believed that it was needed to support a good learning environment. Her shelves were neat, the desks were in rows, and the students worked quietly so that they could concentrate. She thought long and hard about how to reach her students, how to make the subject matter more alive for them, how to maintain their interest. Like many of her colleagues, she did not feel that her teacher training courses had been particularly rich in preparing her to teach, but because she was conscientious — and curious — she constantly evaluated what worked and what didn't in order to expand her repertoire of skills.

Her classes varied, and she developed a range of techniques that could be used depending on student moods and outside influences and interferences. Sometimes she lectured. Sometimes they discussed. Other times the kids did role-plays or gave demonstrations or reports. They took field trips to films and plays when she found something that was particularly appropriate.

The textbook formed the basis for curriculum planning. She and her colleagues cooperated in planning what should be taught and when. Students who took French I covered what they needed in order to be ready for French II. In her English classes, she assessed where students were having difficulty and attempted to give them the skills they lacked. She worried about whether the kids were getting what they needed. Did they understand what paragraphs were? Could they write with depth, correctness, and precision? She often felt frustrated by their lack of skills, by the diversity of their problems, and by their sheer numbers. In order to ensure that she was at once a good colleague, a good employee, and a good teacher, she abided by the rules of the school and was very task-oriented with her students. They wasted little valuable instructional time.

"My idea of a professional was one who supported the rules, who arrived on time, who listened very attentively in faculty meetings but did not necessarily offer an opinion and, if she did, not an adverse or dissenting position — generally because I did not think that to do so was appropriate. I filled out my lesson plan book, and I did the things that were expected of me so that I could be labeled as a good teacher. My professional responsibilities were to teach my students to the best of my ability and to be familiar with my course outline so I could cover all of the topics. In addition, I thought it was my professional responsibility to interact as little as possible with the administration, that I was doing a good job if I did not have to be in their offices, talking with them. They had huge jobs, and I did not want to complicate their lives further.

"I knew I was doing a good job from the number of Commendable's and Exemplary's on my evaluation. I knew I was doing a good job because I kept close tabs on absenteeism in my room. I knew I was doing a good job when I kept the noise level down and the chairs in a straight line. If most of my students passed, and if I didn't have any parent complaints, I knew I was doing a good job. I can tell you, I did things by the book.

"I did experience frustration, and as a result I constantly tried to figure out better ways of working. In the seventies, I built individualized learning packets. It was a start, you know, because at least I felt that I was giving them the opportunity to go at their own pace. The problem with that method was that I ended up with students who had finished and were ready to go on to the second packet and students who were still just beginning on the first packet, and I didn't know how to deal with all of that. It was too much because I had a large classroom and a large number of classes."

Elizabeth also struggled to find ways to engage her students, such as developing a reward system that she believed provided them with heightened motivation. While she laughed at these earlier attempts to deal with her own uneasiness about schooling, she recognized that she had always been working to hone her skills. She had spent a good deal of time over the years standing up at the board, stirring the chalkdust, making a mess all

over, while she tried to think of more powerful ways to reach her students.

Just then, we pulled into the parking lot at Newline High School.

In the Midst of a Comprehensive High School

Newline was a large comprehensive high school comprising eleven buildings. The master schedule was a huge and complicated masterwork that coordinated all 100 teachers and 1602 students through a seven-period day. The facility was filled far beyond capacity; there was no room that was not used every period of the day. Many teachers had their materials on rolling carts — transients because of the lack of space.

Four years previously, Phil Manor, then the school principal, had gone to a national symposium and had heard Ted Sizer speak about the Coalition of Essential Schools. Elizabeth remembered the beginnings of their current project.

"He came back with pages of meticulous notes and he shared these with the faculty. He suggested that we read *Horace's Compromise*. Because a good professional did what she was asked to do by the administrator, I read *Horace*. I was afraid I was going to be tested! I thought he was going to tell us to put our gradebooks under the tables! Anyway, he suggested that he would like to try out the Coalition principles at the high school. I was not exactly sure what all of this involved because he was saying some pretty strange-sounding things for our school — like I would have to work with other teachers, like I would have to relate what I was doing to other teachers, and like it would probably be good if we had a multicertified staff. But I'm a risk-taker, and so I volunteered."

A four-teacher team was subsequently assembled, and the team then devised the following courses as suggested in *Horace's Compromise*: Inquiry and Expression, Literature and the Arts, Mathematics and Science, History and Philosophy. The four teachers were to share eighty students for four hours a day, from the second through sixth period. This instructional time was divided into four two-hour teaching blocks over two days, with each teacher taking twenty students per block. In addition, they were given two planning periods: one was used for planning their own courses, the second was for collaborative work. The teachers had control of the instructional time so they could double-block periods if needed or work all together in a large group. Students volunteered for the program in the tenth grade and stayed with those four teachers for their remaining years in high school. The project was funded in part by a grant from a local foundation, which enabled the teachers to attend Coalition symposia and to do curriculum work.

The district office agreed to a three-year plan. In the middle of the first year, the principal resigned, and an interim principal was assigned. The next year, Gordon Smith was assigned to the building, the third principal in less than two years. Still, the project remained intact.

Three students who had been in the program described their experiences to me. They talked so fast that their comments piled up on one another.

"We really got to know each other well. We got to be good friends with the teachers so that we could really talk to them. We had to do a lot more school work, rather than having something handed to you. We had to develop our own point of view."

"In School-Within-a-School, you have to work on things that interest you and really go after it."

"If you didn't do your work, that was your problem. They let us have more freedom."

"They didn't teach out of books."

"We did more hands-on stuff, rather than having one person stand up there and lecture."

Katie was a freshman at the biggest of the state's universities. "I learned to think for myself in School-Within-a-School. I didn't have to learn that when I walked into college. In School-Within-a-School, we got a problem and were asked to look at it from all different perspectives. We constantly got topics which didn't have a right answer. In School-Within-a-School we had to think about all the old authors — Plato, Socrates — and we had to understand why they said what they said, and then we had to connect it up with everything else we were studying. We focused on our own uniqueness. We did things in art, in music, and in writing so that we could discover our own uniqueness, our own talents. The group helped me to discover that I wanted to be a writer."

One of the boys said, "I always did have talent, but the group refined it for me!" His friends groaned. "And our teachers were always there for us. We all came back to see Mrs. Ehler because she's our friend. Many of us were inspired by our teachers."

Katie recalled that it had been hard to be in the program at first because no one liked being different. By the end of the three years, her feelings had changed. "It was a privilege to be in that school because we were treated so well. When I am comfortable in my environment, I learn more. I felt more confident. I'm shy and would never have spoken out, but I did here and felt confident. I feel that they gave me the gift of my mind."

Another student, a junior who was in the program for two years, described his experience. "I developed more critical thinking skills. I learned to think about why things are the way they are instead of memorizing facts. I can't remember a lot of specific facts I got in there, but I have skills. I feel differently about myself. I think of myself as a scientist in a lab instead of a kid in a class. The other thing was that we felt like a family unit. We came from different social groups and yet we meshed into one. The teachers took that diversity and turned it into a melting pot."

Now in their fourth year, Elizabeth and her colleagues were starting over with a new group of students. The principal, hoping to institutionalize the program, had changed the courses back to English, science, math, and history. Elizabeth taught two eighty-minute blocks of English per day and one study hall. She still had two planning periods, one for personal use and one for team planning.

Elizabeth and Her Changing Role

Elizabeth perceived that her role in the classroom had changed significantly in the course of the past three years. She saw herself as a "coach," a facilitator of student learning, and noted that this stance required quite different behavior from that of conventional teacher. While giving me a tour of the school, she reviewed her new behaviors.

"Most of the time, I move from group to group; I rarely sit down. I'm moving about constantly, asking questions. You know, that's difficult because I don't think we as teachers know how to ask good questions. I work hard to try to formulate questions that will cause the students to think and to respond. Most of my questions recently have been 'why' questions. Yesterday, for instance, I was working with a group of guys who were very excited over the mini-Exhibitions they are just beginning after reading *Of Mice and Men*. First, I asked them what they were going to be doing. They were going to make a parody of the book. I asked them why they wanted to do a parody. There was just dead silence. Finally one of them said, 'I don't think anyone should feel sorry for Lennie. He was mentally deficient and why should you feel sorry for someone who can't do anything anyway?' So my next question to him was, 'Why do you feel that way? Are you saying that a person's worth in society is determined by what he can contribute?' He said no, and we were off into a good discussion.

"I have certainly changed my notions about my professional responsibility. Now I think my responsibility is to become a learner again. I need to do that whether it means interacting with other teachers, participating in workshops, or whatever. I feel it is my responsibility to stay in touch with my administration. I keep them informed as to my opinions about some of the things that are going on in our school community." She smiled and looked sheepish. "Sometimes I'm successful, sometimes I'm not. Sometimes I push the wrong buttons . . .

"My responsibility with the students is to get them to the point where they are confident enough to take that first step in using their minds well, and then, having done that, I need to nurture them as their confidence develops. I am no longer a dispenser of information, and I like that. I see myself as a facilitator. I think that I still run the show, but it's not quite as obvious. I have been learning to ask good questions and am training my students to ask good questions. I spend time convincing them that they want to take responsibility for their learning and then guiding them while they do that."

As we left the faculty room and headed for Elizabeth's classroom, she noted that she used her time differently now. She spent far more time working with her teammates and far more time with her students because they were in her room constantly. She spent less time grading their work and more time assessing it as work-in-progress and coaching the students to practice.

PART II

A Day in Elizabeth's Classroom

Elizabeth's classes met in the school committee boardroom. She had volunteered to take the room because of the lack of space. Seven long rectangular tables were lined up in the room with four chairs at each table. "What I really like about my classroom is that we have tables that lend themselves to grouping and interaction. My students are forced to look at each other and to notice each other's expressions. My desk isn't really noticeable there in the back corner; and because I rarely have a chance to sit at it, it has a different function." The podium at the front was a reminder that this was a boardroom. There was also a big-screen TV, which Elizabeth's team frequently found useful.

At the back of the room, sets of textbooks were neatly stacked in bookshelves: *Adventures in Appreciation, British and Western Literature,* and *Scene Seventy.* Student work — illustrated poems and stories about fall — decorated the walls. "When I think of fall, I think of cold, stormy nights and deep sleep where the sound of rain fills our heads with dreams. I think of brilliant colors jumping from tree to tree and falling to the ground to be collected up in bags . . ." Elizabeth remarked that a mother had called the principal to complain that high school students shouldn't be doing third-grade work.

Elizabeth had done a poster entitled "The Basics of Tomorrow." It listed the skills students would need to succeed in the twenty-first century:

Evaluation and analysis skills
Critical thinking/synthesis
Organization and reference skills
Problem-solving strategies (including math)
Decision-making
Application
Creativity
Communication in a variety of modes

Two large triangles floated above the classroom, suspended from the ceiling, each asking a question:

What is a scholarly attitude?
How does one develop a scholarly attitude?

Elizabeth explained that students often had stereotypical ideas about questioning and about scholarly attitudes. Kids thought that if they questioned their teachers, they would be accused of rudeness. They thought of scholars as bores, as people who have no friends. The students believed that it was an attitude to be assiduously avoided.

To combat these stereotypes, she and her students had spent a good deal of time discussing the two questions. They had progressed to the understanding that scholars are comfortable with questions that do not have answers and with circumstances in which there is no right answer. They were working now on understanding the behaviors of scholars. A list of characteristics of a scholarly attitude, in student handwriting, was posted in the room:

1. Asks good questions
2. Good study habits
3. Willingness to learn
4. Patience — Takes time to learn
5. Good attitude towards school and learning
6. Good listener
7. Accepts that teachers don't always have answers
8. Reads
9. Has charisma
10. Has self-confidence

Two Tenth-Grade English Classes

Twelve tenth-grade students arrived gradually and took their places around the tables. Books spilled over the table tops, coats were draped on chairs, everyone greeted everyone else. The tone in the room was friendly and easy.

The day's agenda was written on the board:

1. Good/bad discussion
2. Journals
3. Groups do two tasks
4. Individual work

Elizabeth moved to the side of the room, welcomed everyone, and asked how they were doing.

Some moaned and buried their heads in their arms; others said, "Fine." She asked them to get their learning logs out and to review what learning techniques worked for them and what didn't. She also asked them to think about identifying the kinds of triangles the scholarly attitude questions were on. The students leafed through their notebooks. One student said the triangles were isosceles; someone else said that they were not because the angles weren't right. After a bit more discussion, Elizabeth asked them how they might find out precisely. Another student said she'd ask Ms. Wells, their math teacher.

Someone asked Elizabeth to explain again what a mini-Exhibition was. She answered that it was a demonstration of their understanding of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. Because they would actually demonstrate what they had learned, they needed enough time to do the assignment very thoroughly. They would be working on these demonstrations for the next two weeks. She reminded them that she had suggested several options: they could make a film of a particularly moving or pivotal scene; they could write a seventh chapter in Steinbeck's style; they could develop a scene that was mentioned or alluded to in the book but not thoroughly described.

Elizabeth inquired how the kids' parents had responded to their grades, whether there were any surprises. More moans.

Elizabeth asked the students whether they had any more questions about the work they had done the previous week. Since there were no responses, she asked them to write in their journals for the next ten minutes, a regular classroom exercise to develop fluidity. "You can free-write or you can write about any current event which might be of interest to you. The Berlin Wall came tumbling down this weekend, and there were also two important rallies right here in our town. You may wish to write about those." Elizabeth discussed the assignment privately with one student back at her desk. He left the room. The rest of the room was quiet while the students wrote.

After ten minutes, she asked them to stop and to review the homework assignment she had given them for the weekend. They were to have chosen one of the mini-Exhibitions from the list she had given them, or she would entertain their ideas if none of the options looked appealing. They were to have planned their use of time and generated a list of the things they would need. Only one student had done it; after a little investigation, it appeared that the students felt uncertain about what she had asked them to do. They had never done a mini-Exhibition before, and they had never been asked to plan their time. They didn't know what such a plan should look like. Elizabeth concurred. She reviewed the assignment and the nature of a mini-Exhibition and then gave them some clues on working in groups. "You-all have not done mini-Exhibition work before, so this is new to you and is genuinely complex. You should expect some problems. You may wish to appoint a facilitator for your group who will monitor your schedules and keep you on task. The facilitator should appoint a recorder. The recorders will hand in the time schedules and your —"

Announcements burst over the intercom mid-sentence. "Homecoming pictures can be picked up in the counselors' office. Students can order their video yearbook in the main office. Today is the Great American Smoke-out, and we hope everyone will participate. The Foreign Friends Club is meeting this afternoon in room 503. Please bring fifty cents as your contribution to the up-and-coming language fair." The students talked quietly right through the announcements.

"Where was I? Oh, yes. The recorders need to hand in your schedules and your daily evaluations. I know you haven't devised an evaluation before either, but you'll get better as the days progress."

One student asked, "I don't get the evaluation — we're supposed to tell you what we did during each day, right? Can we use a scale from one to ten to rate how we did?" Nodding, she told them to use whatever method worked best for them and reminded them that they could revise it over time. She asked them to work on the two tasks for the next thirty minutes. She walked to the girl who had actually done her planning schedule, looked it over, and congratulated her. She then asked her to put it up on the board as a model for the rest of the class. Other students dispersed. One boy moved to a table by himself. The rest worked in groups of two, three, or four students. Elizabeth moved around the room, stopping to check with each of the groups.

Two boys worked together quietly, hunched over their notes, sitting side by side. Their list read: "Go to the library. Finish reading."

"I think we should switch them. Like we should go to the library after we've done some writing."

"Hmmm," considered the second. He was the recorder.

As several students left to go to the library, Elizabeth moved to another group of two boys. These two had planned to use their study-hall time. They told her they'd agreed to write a seventh chapter. Their schedule read:

Monday:	Reread Chapter 6. Study it carefully.
Tuesday:	Outline Chapter 6. Begin discussing ideas for Chapter 7.
Thursday:	Make small rough draft. Begin Chapter 7.
Monday:	Go to library to research Steinbeck's writing style. Finish Chapter 7.
Wednesday:	Turn in completed assignment (typed).
Evaluation:	Be graded on a scale of one to ten on the amount of progress and quality of work we completed that day.

They discussed whether they knew how to use computers and whether they would read Chapter 6 together. Elizabeth asked them to be more specific about their evaluation. She suggested a variety of possibilities. She moved off to join another group.

After thirty minutes, Elizabeth asked her students to talk about how they felt about doing the planning. One boy noted that he felt very rushed. She laughed and said that they should clearly begin to see that they had little time to waste. She resumed her roving for the remainder of the first hour. The tone in the room was relaxed but serious.

A group of girls said that they were looking forward to their report because they were going to select a topic they were very interested in. "Can we do this like a report to the class instead of as a paper?" Elizabeth said yes, they must use the same procedures they used in Mr. Daley's room — bibliography and note cards.

At that point, most of the class filed out for their five-minute break. Several students stayed back to visit with Elizabeth. She talked animatedly with them, admired pictures, and listened. When the class returned, Elizabeth returned to working with the groups.

The two boys, Todd and Bryan, skipped to generating ideas. Elizabeth joined them to review their progress. "Todd, tell me what you two have done so far."

He began to explain, then looked at her and said, "Do you want me to read what we've got so far?"

"Whatever you want to do."

He read. She interrupted, saying, "How can that be believable?"

They grinned at each other. Bryan said, "I told you she'd think that."

Todd explained their rationale, with Bryan interrupting when important details were missed. Elizabeth persisted in asking questions.

"Why would Curley want to do that?"

"Because of the rape."

When he'd finished with his explanation, Todd looked at her and said with experimental certainty, "There's irony in this."

She was clearly delighted and agreed. "You're right. That's very good." Again, she moved among the various groups, answering questions, asking questions, never sitting.

Toward the end of the hour, she sat down with me to share her own beliefs about the benefits of teaching in this way. "The advantage is that the students begin to realize that they are individuals, that they each have strengths to contribute. I have a lot more time to engage in face-to-face interaction with my students, so I have more time to get to know them, to know what they need to work on. And because we teach in teams, the students each have four teachers who know them well. I think they have a much broader base of support."

Elizabeth talked about the complexity of the Coalition ideas, the set of nine Common Principles that guided the work she and her teammates were engaged in (see Appendix A). For instance, she felt that the concept of teacher-as-coach and student-as-worker demanded a great deal from teachers.[4] "It requires that both teachers and students make a commitment. And there is a paradox that happens when teachers think about making the transition. When they move to coaching, teachers are afraid to give up old ways for fear that they will be losing something. The paradox lies in the fact that you get a lot more than you give up, because students are so much more involved."

As the double period neared an end, Elizabeth called for the students' plans and for their evaluations of the work they'd completed during the day. The students handed in notebooks or papers and moved out of the room quickly; they had only twenty minutes for lunch.

Once the room had emptied, she explained the difficulty these concepts presented for her students. "This group is new. We've only been working with them for nine weeks, so they are not 100 percent

comfortable with the notion of student-as-worker. They still want 'right' answers. We have been working on their understandings of scholarly attitudes. I started off gradually trying to convince them that they have at least 50 percent of the responsibility for their own education. This mini-Exhibition exercise is their first opportunity to develop their own stuff."

While she was ruminating, her twenty-minute lunch period disappeared, and her next group of tenth-grade students began to wander in. Elizabeth turned around to find a student at her elbow who wished to make a phone call. Tina wanted to call a famous Southern gospel musician, a pianist, to interview him about whether he had a "life dream" and how he fulfilled it. She had picked this assignment because each of the characters in *Of Mice and Men* had a life dream but not one of them ever fulfilled that dream. She wanted to interview someone who had actually pursued his dream and gone forward with it. She liked this assignment because "it's better than just sitting in class looking at books all day. It's hard, though, because it takes so much work to get ahold of him." She had called twice previously and had been directed to different numbers and then told to call at a particular time. Elizabeth left the room, telling the rest of her students where she was going and asking them to review their notes from the previous week in preparation for a "good/bad" discussion when she got back. She took her personal phone credit card because the school couldn't afford calls of this nature.

During the five minutes or so they were gone, the rest of the students settled in to work. They leafed through their journals and talked in their groups. When Elizabeth and Tina arrived back in the room, Elizabeth opened the good/bad discussion, an opportunity for the students to review and reflect on the class and their own work. She asked them, "What did you do in class last week that you enjoyed or that you gained from? Could I have been more helpful to you in any way?"

There was silence for several minutes. One girl responded, "We were supposed to have an open-book quiz on the short story we've been working on." Elizabeth gasped. "Why, thank you. I completely forgot. I'll get going right away on that." The other kids yelled at the reminding culprit.

Another student said, "I finished the book, and I thought it was real depressing." Others nodded.

"What depressed you?" Elizabeth asked.

"Well, it was just such a gray book. And while nobody seemed bad, nothing good ever seemed to happen." As the student was talking, Elizabeth walked over to another student whose head was on his arms to see if he was okay. He looked up sleepily and said, "I'm just readin'." Everyone laughed again.

They returned to reviewing the day's work — a clarification of their mini-Exhibitions, the evaluations, and the planning. Elizabeth concluded the review by suggesting, "If you can do these mini-Exhibitions in one day, then we need to talk. Maybe we haven't designed it right. You should think about the mini-Exhibitions as a way to help you answer the question on why Steinbeck wrote this book."

This group was livelier, less prone to work cooperatively.[5] They talked louder, were wormier, moved around more. One group of boys described the violence they would do as a team to Lennie and to George as they reconstructed the book. A group of girls looked through their homecoming pictures. Elizabeth worked individually with a girl who wanted to do a baby book for Lennie as her mini-Exhibition. Elizabeth pushed her to clarify the purpose of the baby book. What would it teach her about Lennie? She suggested that the girl go back through the book to find all of the passages that refer to Lennie's aunt and to his earlier life.

She moved quickly to the next group. While she worked with them, another group of four boys concentrated on making animal noises and began bopping each other surreptitiously. Two of the boys became very uptight, repeating that they needed to figure out what it was they were going to do. Eventually, they agreed to do the film. One described a series of violent scenes they might do — giggling all the way. As if in a refrain, one continued to ask for seriousness while another told the story of how his brother had starved his hamster. They talked about rewriting the whole book; half of the group laughed hysterically, while the other half grew more tight-lipped and more frustrated.

Three girls were engaged in an intense conversation about which scene they would do. They talked about Aunt Clara and how much they knew about her. Maybe they could do a scene between Aunt Clara and Lennie. The facilitator yelled, "You-all!" to bring them back on task. One of the girls suggested that they find the scene where Curley's wife was with Lennie. The facilitator

read aloud while they all leaned forward, listening.

The bell rang for the mid-period break. The students moved out into the halls. Elizabeth read a note handed to her by a student; she hugged the student and thanked her. One of the boys asked her if it would be okay for him to come by her house that evening about eight o'clock because their group wanted to film their scene on her property. She ran through her own children's basketball schedule and suggested eight-thirty.

Mr. Daley, one of her team members, came into the classroom to observe.

The kids trickled back in and resumed their work. Elizabeth got the giggling group looking through their notes to see what they did and didn't know in order to do a final chapter of the book. She moved to the next group, handling four questions from other groups while working in the midst of this group. One boy was pursuing *Of Mice and Men* as a tragedy, so she directed him to clearer definitions of tragedy and maybe some comparative possibilities. Two girls came back in from the library with a stack of notecards. They had found too many resources and were despairing. Elizabeth suggested several strategies for sorting through and eliminating some of them.

Elizabeth moved to work with another boy who had done his homework and who already had a draft of the seventh chapter. He explained that he tried to maintain the tone of hopelessness that pervaded the rest of the book. He had written seven pages but needed some suggestions for the reworking. "When I finished the book, I thought there should be more to it. I just started writing and it evolved. I think I'll keep most of this stuff. Does it sound like Steinbeck?" He read, "The frost on the barley ricks sunk deep into my hands." Elizabeth appreciated that sentence as Steinbeckian but suggested he examine his dialogue, compare it to Steinbeck's. She hugged him and told him to keep pushing, that he was doing fine work.

She conferenced with another group, which read what they'd done so far. She asked, "Where is it going from here?" The recorder responded, "I don't know really. I think I'm gonna have the cook wagon fall on Cookie's leg and then I might have the three of them move off together. I don't know from there." The rest of his group argued with him.

Across the room, a girl took out her compact and checked herself out — a serious examination of teenage beauty. She took lip gloss out, put it on, and sent it around her group. Then they all sprayed Binaca in their mouths.

Elizabeth moved to the front of the room as the second hour was nearing an end. Slightly modifying part of the assignment she had given them to think about earlier, she said, "I'd like you to take out a half sheet of paper and answer the question, 'What have I accomplished today?' I'd like you to think through what it was that you had to do and what you did. Please be as specific as possible. This is an individual self-evaluation." The room was silent. Elizabeth stood at the front of the room and gazed outside. The sun was shining on the bleached, winter-white football field; the temperature had dropped thirty degrees in the course of the day.

After five or six minutes, she asked them to stop and share. The spokesperson for the Binaca group quietly admitted they had spent some of their time looking at homecoming pictures. She said they didn't do a very good job. Elizabeth confirmed that it was very easy to get off track but asked her to clarify why she believed they hadn't done a good job. The girl blurted out that she was working with a group that was doing an assignment she was not really interested in. Elizabeth suggested that that was an important insight and that perhaps the student might want to work alone.

She asked the divided table of gigglers what they had accomplished. Sam, who was so frustrated, said that it was really hard for them to get anything done once they picked a topic because it was hard to get the others to concentrate. She asked him how he would rate their use of time given a scale of one through ten. He said they would rate about a five because they talked too much. She listed the work they had accomplished — they'd selected a mini-Exhibition topic, narrowed their focus, and brainstormed a list of possibilities, playing them out — and reminded them that the difficult part about group work was that everyone had to take responsibility. She encouraged them by noting that tomorrow would be more productive.

The two girls who'd been to the library reported that they had planned their week and made up an evaluation, which they had filled out already for that day. Then they had chosen their mini-Exhibition, gone to the library, and found too many resources. They were just now identifying what they would use. They sounded very efficient and clear about their own productivity.

As the bell rang for the end of the sixth period, Elizabeth wished them all a good evening and told them that she looked forward to working with them the next day.

As the students left the room, Elizabeth shared her perceptions with Peter Daley. "This group is my challenge. I had two possible approaches: I could have lectured them or I could have stuck to my original plan to give them the opportunity to evaluate themselves. I would have lost them completely if I hadn't turned it back to them. Did you notice how the room changed when I asked them to get out a piece of paper? Like I was going to give them a pop quiz. I used to feel so sick when teachers asked me to take out a piece of paper — like I was about to be stripped naked! These kids are just taking a little longer to trust me and each other." Elizabeth was clear that she believed this group, too, would evolve into units able to work together, but she recognized that it would take a little more time than the rest of her students.

Just then a former student walked in to visit. Two more arrived as Elizabeth's two other teammates assembled for their team-planning period. Elizabeth looked momentarily exhausted as she faced both visitors and her colleagues, who needed to get on with their meeting. She took a deep breath, threw her arms around the students, and walked them toward the door, saying, "How are you-all? I am so glad to see you. Will you be around after seventh period? I have a meeting right now." The students exchanged greetings with some of the other teachers as they moved out into the hall.

A Team Planning Session

The four team members gathered around a table in the middle of the room: Tom Whitman, the science teacher; Peter Daley, the history teacher; Sally Watkins, the first-year math teacher; and Elizabeth. Peter's student teacher, Elaine Martinson, also joined the group. They began slowly, visiting among themselves, comparing notes on the day. The tone was friendly and easy. They reminded each other of things they needed to deal with, until Sally recalled that they had already postponed talking about a student whom she wanted to transfer to another class. They reviewed his schedule and made the adjustments. Peter asked how the filming had gone — both Elizabeth and Tom had been videotaped the day before. They recapped their feelings and the kids' reactions. Elizabeth checked with the team to see if anyone would cover her classes for her on Friday so that she could attend an important meeting. No one was particularly receptive. Elizabeth said that she would try to get a substitute. She inquired about a work space during first period since the boardroom was in use by one of the language teachers. Everyone who had a room invited her to share their space.

They moved on to other issues on the agenda. Elizabeth reviewed the latest request from a superintendent in a neighboring state to come and visit their program. The others marked their calendars. They marked in Tom's trip to Tennessee to another conference at which he was presenting. Peter said he felt a need to work on ways they might integrate disciplines as he began to cover the ancient Greeks. They discussed who was doing what and when. Sally thought she would be able to switch to Pythagoras when Tom was ready. They listed the resources they had available to them, including books on mythology and copies of *Oedipus Rex*. Tom suggested that he could do classification and offered to check on other possibilities. Peter wondered whether everyone should read *Oedipus*. They laughed and noted that the kids still really liked it because it was a mystery, convoluted and "weird." Peter asked everyone on the team to reread *Oedipus* so that they might have a more in-depth discussion of the possible uses. They agreed.

Continuing, Peter waxed eloquent for a few moments on the importance of "connections" for kids. He really wanted them to see the interrelated nature of the disciplines, because he felt that it breathed more life into what they were doing. He asked whether they might have a more serious session to brainstorm connections. Tom suggested they might use as the central focus questions about the influence the Greeks have had on contemporary life. Perhaps they should begin with a walk through a neighboring town to see its Greek revivalist architecture. Elizabeth questioned Peter about myths, fables, and the recent PBS series with Joseph Campbell to see how they might cooperate.

Although they appeared to be warming to the subject of possible connections, the topic shifted when Peter mentioned that Elaine had been very frustrated with the reports the students were currently doing. Elaine verified that she could "just as easily have pulled their teeth" as get them to revise their work. Elaine and Peter agreed that

the idea for the reports was good but that the results were dismal. Elizabeth asked for a description of the problems. "Is it that they can't get the information that they need? Or is it that they don't know how to extract information from resources? Or is it that they don't know how to organize it once they've gotten it?"

Elaine looked chagrined. "I don't think that they even know how to write paragraphs, really — with a topic sentence and supporting ideas." Peter chimed in, "The kids just have not written much. They are not used to doing what we are asking them to do. If it means that we do less world history while they get it, that's the way it goes."

Elaine continued to analyze the problem. "The topics are too broad. Maybe I didn't give them enough of an assignment, but even given that, I don't think they could do a very good job. The kids are tired of it." The group went back and forth in an attempt to diagnose the problem and figure out how to salvage the assignment.

Elizabeth asked, "Is there tension between you and the students over this, Elaine?"

Elaine said, "It's really hard not to blame the kids, but it is simply not their fault. They need to be taught. But I don't think I can salvage this assignment." Various solutions were suggested: a trip to the local university library to beef up their research skills; one-on-one conferencing about their writing skills; some plain old grammar work. Elaine said she would bring some of the reports over for Elizabeth to read, who in turn agreed to rearrange what she was doing to help build the skills the kids needed once they determined what was to be done with these reports.

The discussion turned to Peter's exploration of his students' curiosity. Tom reminded the group that they had only had these students for nine weeks and that they needed patience. Their discontent stemmed from comparing these students to the students with whom they had worked for three years. They all felt cheered by Tom's comment and agreed how genuinely likeable the kids were.

They then moved into a discussion of a particular student, which led them to a greater understanding of the seriousness of the student's problems. As a result, they agreed to set up an appointment with the student and to follow that up with a meeting with the parents.

Sally raised the final issue. The principal had suggested that he would like to administer an evaluation of their program to their students soon, to be given in the gym without the teachers present. They pushed to determine what the evaluation would be used for, but since they couldn't clarify that until they talked to Mr. Smith, Tom asked that they consider what they, as a team, would like to know from an evaluation. They brainstormed:

Which of your classes is most like ninth grade?
Are you asked to write more than you were in ninth grade?
Describe your best learning experience so far this year.
Are you comfortable with the way your classes are scheduled?
Are you comfortable with the ways your classes are organized?
Are you being challenged to think? If so, how? If not, why not?
Describe your favorite class activity.
Do you enjoy your classes? If so, why? If not, why not?

They went back and forth among the questions, prodding for clarity and for differences. Each of them agreed to think of several questions that would really help them better serve their students and to bring them to the next day's meeting. By the time they broke up, it was nearly five o'clock, and everyone was exclaiming about being late to pick up children, spouses, groceries, and complaining that they had papers to grade.

Elizabeth crammed a set of class learning logs into a bag and rushed out to pick up her son at basketball practice. She called to the former students who had come to visit: she was so sorry, could they come back, how were their parents, siblings, boyfriends, girlfriends, classes, jobs. They trailed her out to her car. Katie showed her a paper she had recently written for her toughest journalism class at the local university. She'd gotten a B, the highest grade in the class. She wanted to share her rich delight with Mrs. Ehler.

Elizabeth stopped in the parking lot, hugged Katie, and said, "You're gonna be a famous journalist some day. I just know it. We all will be watching you on television, reading your own stuff. Keep pushing yourself." Stuffing bags and books into the van, Elizabeth hopped in, while Katie yelled, "Barbara Walters, LOOK OUT!"

PART III

Reflections on Pedagogical Change

A day in Elizabeth Ehler's classroom did not reflect the kind of teaching she had described as characteristic of her first ten years in the profession. She laughingly described it as her type of personal make-over. In the course of the past four years, Elizabeth had stopped using standardized textbooks as her basic curriculum. She had moved her desk from the front of the room to the back and now used it as a place for conferences with individual students. She had developed different relationships with her students, asking them to work in different ways and changing her own role from a "deliverer-of-instructional-services" to a "teacher-as-coach." In addition, she had worked closely with three other teachers, joined a much larger network of teachers nationally, and spent more time with her students' parents.

Elizabeth made all of these changes because she believed they were important if she was to provide a better quality education for her students.

An examination of these changes should prove fruitful for a variety of reasons: to understand the effects of the Coalition partnership as it plays out in classrooms; to understand the conditions that made change possible for Elizabeth; to reveal the roadblocks and impediments she encountered along the way; and to determine what motivated Elizabeth and her colleagues to keep going. Close scrutiny of Elizabeth's efforts reveals valuable insights into both the complexities and the possibilities of such efforts.

Adapting the Nine Common Principles

Elizabeth indicated that many of the changes she had made were the result of their team's attempt to put the nine Common Principles into practice. Elizabeth described her experience as the team attempted to build a more powerful learning environment for their students based on their interpretation of the principles.

"When we began School-Within-a-School three years ago, we worked to implement all the principles from the beginning, so the ideas and concepts have been with me for a while and it is difficult for me to give one a higher priority than another. They are all interrelated and each affects the others. I suppose, though that it all starts with the 1:80 ratio."

Elizabeth was referring to principle #4, which proposes that no secondary teacher should have responsibility for more than eighty students per term. Reduced student loads allow teachers to know their students well, so that the course of study can be tailored to individual student needs. Reduced loads also allow teachers the time to plan more complex curricula designed for heightened student engagement.

"Although many educators adamantly believe that most of the principles already exist in classrooms across the country, I do not agree. When I taught 1:150, I was not the same teacher and could not engage students in the same way.

"I believe that I have come to understand the concept of personalization because I have had no more than eighty students and because I had the opportunity to work with those students over time. Because my classes are small, I find I am able to do some of my instruction through writing personal notes, comments, letters; the students and I communicate in their learning logs. In addition, because I know my students better, I see them as whole people as opposed to students in an English class. I am able to help them and to grade them more holistically.

"When we began, the district supported us by putting the 1:80 ratio in place and by providing us with common students and common planning time. They did this by telling parents and students about the program and by allowing students to volunteer. Once eighty-some students volunteered, they were scheduled with us for four periods of the day. We four teachers discovered that our first task was to teach the students that they *could* use their minds well.[6] They literally panicked when worksheets were replaced with less familiar ways of learning. We had most of those students for three years though and, by the end, they were excellent critical thinkers.

"The notion of student-as-worker[7] has been a hard one for many of my students, as has the

concept of mini-Exhibitions. I think, though, it is change that frightens them. But their fears diminish over time. In addition, some of the students' apprehensions have been fueled by their parents' concerns. One parent told our principal, 'I don't want my child in a class where he has to do all the work.' Initially, my students had difficulty with the idea that we trusted them, period. That, too, developed over time. We have not tackled the question of diplomas awarded by Exhibition[8] because our state regulations seem so prohibitive. However, we have begun building mini-Exhibitions so that our students develop a greater familiarity with them.

"I have also changed in that while my course is called "English" this year, I also teach geography, history, some French, a little art, and current events, among others. In fact, I perceive myself differently. I feel more like an elementary school teacher, and I try to model this approach to the interconnectedness of things so that students will consider this a natural philosophy of learning. Another ramification of this change is best expressed by my husband. He says, 'Liz, before you were a part of the Coalition, you didn't seem to come home nearly so exhausted.' He's right. I determine curriculum, juggle and revise schedules, encourage, discipline. And I find that because I have the time to know my students well, there develops a strong bond between them and me. They are quick to tell me their successes and their sorrows. I am constantly interacting with my students.

"One important thing I've learned as a result of trying to put these principles into action is that parents should be treated as essential collaborators. Most of our School-Within-a-School parents became our champions, but we spent time educating them as to what we were trying to do. Now, starting over again, I am finding it necessary to educate my parents again."

In Elizabeth's school, the nine Common Principles were not posted anywhere, nor did the teachers talk about them daily in their meetings together. However, the principles appeared to undergird the decisions they had made, while leaving them free to choose their own structures and their own language for descriptive purposes. For instance, Elizabeth's students were exploring scholarly attitudes and defining those attitudes in much the same way Elizabeth and her colleagues had characterized student-as-worker. The relationship of the nine Common Principles to the changes Elizabeth's team had made was important in that the principles provoked them to consider and consequently to rearrange certain traditional school practices. On the other hand, Elizabeth did not appear to feel prescriptively bound by them.

Supports for Change

Elizabeth believed that a number of other factors in addition to the nine Common Principles had been in place to make change possible. Those factors were varied and touched on several educational arenas. They included a champion for change, the networking she engaged in as a result of Newline's partnership with Brown and other Essential schools, team collaboration, systemic support from within her district, the allocation of time, and the unique personal characteristics that she and her teammates seemed to share.

Elizabeth declared that their first principal had functioned for them as a champion for change, both by inspiring them and by enabling them to take the risks and then giving them the freedom to experiment. "Change is so difficult; it is such hard work. People need to realize that somewhere in all of the crowd, there has to be a champion. That champion needs to speak loudly and clearly for those who are trying to implement Coalition principles, because without that champion, people just feel in the dark." While he was not at the school very long after the program was put into place, everyone on Elizabeth's team agreed that nothing would ever have been started without his initiative and support.

A new kind of relationship — the Coalition network — also helped Elizabeth to change. The partnership with Brown and with other schools across the country that were struggling with the same sorts of ideas was extremely beneficial. "When I first met Ted Sizer in Cleveland, we had decided that my course would be called Inquiry and Expression, one of the courses Ted had suggested in *Horace's Compromise*. I had no idea what that meant or what I was going to do. I asked him for suggestions. I thought that since he wrote the book, he would know and he would tell me. He said, 'You know, I'm not exactly sure; let me think about that and I'll get back to you in the morning.' I was very shocked. I thought, 'What do you mean you have to think about it?' The next day he told me that he intended his work to be interpreted, that it wasn't by any means ever intended to be a model, so he

really had to do some thinking. Between us, he and I hashed out a couple of places from which to begin. Over the summer, he and my colleagues and I talked through what I had done; initially, I think, we all needed reassurance, since none of us really knew how to get started."

In time, Elizabeth realized that Sizer's initial response provided her with an example of the kind of relationship she wished to develop with her students: co-explorers, thoughtful people who were comfortable knowing that there are very few right answers. Over the years, Elizabeth had developed a number of connections with other experimenters — teachers, principals, and professors — and together they had discussed new approaches, compared interpretations of the Common Principles, and critiqued each other's work.

A second kind of relationship was also new to Elizabeth and remarkably helpful. Elizabeth indicated that her relationship with her Newline colleagues was her major source of support. "My relationship with my teammates is a whole new relationship. The level of interaction we have, the support, the encouragement, have been extremely positive. I concentrate almost all of my energy on these people. I think I mentioned before that I was so afraid of working with them; there is such irony in that fear! I keep a file for each of my team members. I have folders full of ideas they have shared with me, letters we have written during the summer, examples of their students' work which taught me something. We are constantly teaching each other."

Systemic support came in several forms. The group received a grant to help them get going, which allowed them the time to experiment and to gain the later support of their school board. Of greater symbolic importance, the grant gave legitimacy to the experiment, because it demonstrated that outsiders agreed that the project was important. The grant, which totaled $30,000, allowed them $10,000 per year.

Elizabeth noted that none of this would have been possible had the district superintendent not been willing to allow the Coalition project initially. She also credited Mr. Smith for his work in continuing the program and for working with them.

Time was another aspect of systemic support. The fact that they had been granted three years in which to work at the outset of the project increased the likelihood that significant change might take place. Then, the teachers were given an extra planning period each day so they could make collective decisions about their use of time during the school day and so they could generate the necessary curriculum. In addition, they reorganized their instructional time so they had longer blocks of time with their students. Each reconfiguration allowed the teachers the opportunity to try out new techniques and arrangements, to revise, and to try again.

The autonomy they were given to rearrange their time and to redesign their curriculum was also important. While they frequently felt they might be the blind leading the blind, they were also clear that the autonomy pushed them to ask questions they had not previously asked and to design experimental units which they later refined and reworked. Elizabeth summarized, "Practice, practice, practice. That's what we did!"

While musing over the support that had enabled her to change, Elizabeth noted that she and her colleagues had discovered one characteristic they all had in common. They were all curious, knowledge-seeking people, investigators — good learners themselves. While she felt that the term was overused, she believed that they were "risk-takers." "I know that's been talked about till we're all sick to death of it and, at first, I didn't understand it, but a lot of the work of change you do alone. You really do, and you just have to be willing to test the waters. We have all been willing to do that. We're all readers, and thinkers, interested in learning for ourselves as well as for our students."

Impediments to Change

While a number of people and conditions existed that made change possible for them, there were simultaneous forces at work that Elizabeth believed impeded her team's work. She noted that there is a great deal of paradox in change: oftentimes those circumstances that enable change also constrain it. She also believed that some of the impediments, such as their personal fears, diminished over time, while others — including a variety of personal and structural transitions, and resentment from the larger faculty — had remained a constant source of difficulty.

Just as their own personalities had enabled them to undertake this work, their own fears had played a part in restricting them. Elizabeth felt fearful of a number of circumstances. "I was very

concerned about working with my colleagues. I felt that there might be a time when I would have to let down my guard and let them know that I didn't know everything I was supposed to know. I felt very vulnerable.

"Becoming a generalist also caused anxiety for me." Elizabeth was referring to #8 of the Common Principles, which states that teachers and principals should perceive themselves as generalists more than as specialists. Such a stance allows teachers to interconnect various disciplines for students and to take greater responsibility for the whole student. "It implied that I had to have a general knowledge of many things. I felt secure in English and in French, but there were some areas in which I knew I was not that strong. I felt that I needed to be able to provide information on history, the arts, and mathematics, among other things. I wondered whether I had the ability to communicate all of this general stuff to encourage a group of heterogeneously mixed kids. As a French teacher, my students were all college-bound and, as such, at the top of their class academically. I didn't know whether I'd be able to present things so that all of my students — not just the college-bound — could grasp the concepts."[9]

Elizabeth was also uncertain about her changing relationships. While she looked forward to closer relationships with her students, she felt unprepared for the responses of principals and parents, largely because she was just beginning. "During that first year, the first sources of contention were the parents of some of my students, and the interim principal. Because all of this was new, I was somewhat insecure in what I was doing. I did not have the same sense of security and confidence I have now. I was not sure if I could answer some of those criticisms ('Why is your classroom so noisy? You know, a good classroom is a quiet classroom.' or 'I don't want my child in a room where he has to do all the work.'). I didn't have enough in my heart to say to myself, 'This is good for your students; you know what you're doing.' One day the principal said to me, 'I've been a teacher for many years and my students learned all they needed to learn while they were at their desks. Why do they have to leave your classroom or wander around the room?' I wondered whether I was doing the right thing. It was frightening to me because my professional credibility was being challenged. It literally made me physically ill. I just didn't know how to respond."

A second major impediment to the team's work at Newline stemmed from the various transitions that had taken place over the previous three years. Most notably, they had had three principals in less than two years. While the first principal had been their champion, he left hastily in the middle of their first year. The interim principal was not familiar with the Coalition, nor was he a supporter. Elizabeth described the impact on their time that the interim principal had. "We spent an enormous amount of time convincing him, explaining, pleading." The loss of support from the school administrator impeded their change effort. Although his successor, Mr. Smith, had eventually come to support their efforts, Elizabeth and her colleagues had had to work hard to build principal support, and each transition took a toll in their time and energy.

Mr. Smith described his response to the program as one of "skeptical supporter." "If it hadn't been for the four teachers who really believed in the program, it would have disappeared. I wasn't for it when I came here. I didn't believe that Ted Sizer and his group knew anything about our context here, our size, our budget. I'm still skeptical. Another Coalition principal talked to us the other day. His problems are so different from ours. He has forty-four seniors; I have five hundred and fifty. I have more teachers than he has students. Almost nobody involved in this project, nationwide, knows what a nightmare it is to schedule things. I just don't know if people have the patience to wait for change or not."

Despite his skepticism, Mr. Smith had worked with the team to maintain and eventually to expand the program. He was confounded in those efforts because he still had responsibility for the rest of their very large high school. His desk verified that he was literally buried under the paperwork required to run a large school. In addition, he did not perceive the state guidelines and laws to be very supportive of significant change.[10]

In the midst of their work, the basic structure of the program underwent significant transition as well. During the third year, the school board had voted to expand the program utilizing existing school monies. (The original three-year, non-renewable grant had been used up, but the governor became an ever stronger supporter, which added political pressure for the district to maintain the program.) Elizabeth and her colleagues submitted

a report outlining their recommendations for the expansion of the program, most of which were ignored. Course titles, and consequently course content, were changed back to basic discipline configurations — math, science, English, and history. Students were enrolled randomly rather than by volunteering for the program.

Because there was hope that the program would be institutionalized throughout the school, the teachers were discouraged from holding meetings for parents and from describing their purposes to their students. The hope was that if the program were not billed as an option, or as something different, and if the courses had the same names as in the larger program, participants would accept it more readily. In addition, the expanded program was established for only one year. As a result, Elizabeth and the other team members felt very insecure. And, like Mr. Smith, they did not perceive the state laws governing public education to be very supportive of their work. "Because I must document my students' mastery of a whole host of basic skills, I am sometimes in conflict with what I know I 'should' teach and the goal of 'Less is more.'"[11]

Another impediment was the transition the students went through on entering the program. Elizabeth noted that her team's fourth year was almost a repeat of the first year. Students weren't used to having the same four teachers for all of their core subjects for three years. In addition, because the team chose to reorganize periods so that teachers had two-hour blocks with their students, the students' schedule was different from many of their friends'. Their parents were skeptical of anything that was out of the ordinary. Students did not like being different from everyone else, and they were unfamiliar with the kinds of working relationships their teachers were attempting to establish. Elizabeth described one resistant student: "He's a 'back pew' kind of a student. He doesn't want to look me in the eye. He doesn't want me to find out what he's working on. I think it's threatening for him."

Other students complained about a variety of things. One felt that it would hurt her chances for college. Another student said he just plain didn't like being asked to think up questions. "It is more than that they have been asked to change the way they do things. I think it's how they perceive who they are in relationship to the rest of the school community. They do not want to be different. They have to work hard. They meet in two-hour blocks and nobody else does. We don't use textbooks like everybody else does. One girl noted that the other classes have read ten short stories already and we have only read five. We've been at this for nine weeks, and I feel from my students the same hesitations, the same apprehensions, even the same animosities that I felt three years ago. I am just now beginning to see a glimmer of light in some of their eyes — an indication that they are coming to the realization that maybe they do have partial responsibility for their learning."

While she was beginning to see progress, Elizabeth noted that each new group of students that entered the program encountered difficulties as both the students and their parents weathered the transition.

While these personal fears and transitions had proved difficult, Elizabeth and her colleagues felt that they were able to deal with them, able to take direct action. A third impediment proved to be more quietly troublesome. The rest of the faculty in this large comprehensive high school knew very little about their program other than that these teachers were given fewer students and an extra planning period. All of Elizabeth's team members indicated that their relationship with their colleagues in the school at large was tenuous. Peter Daley explained. "There is some tension with the teachers who are not in the program. We never know what they're thinking. Obviously the tension comes from the fact that we have seventy-three students and they have a hundred and fifty, we've got two planning periods and they've got one. It's always under the surface, but I feel it and I'm sure it's there."

Two teachers from the larger faculty described what they believed the rest of the staff felt. A business ed teacher said, "The rest of the faculty just doesn't talk about it. Maybe we don't talk about it because we don't know anything about it. I also think they are resentful of the extra period off and of the class size." A language teacher confirmed his colleague's comments. "We know nothing about the program. It's a great mystery, in fact. The faculty have a bad taste in their mouth because they have first and seventh periods off and so few students. I know what Elizabeth does first period — same thing I do, nothing — but I don't know what happens for the rest of the day."

Elizabeth and her colleagues despaired that no forum existed for them to share their experiences

with their colleagues. A number of times they had suggested informal sharing sessions but had been refused. Even if they were given the opportunity to share information about their program, they were unsure whether they could dispel the tension, since any discussion of change tended to make many people defensive. While they had gained enormously from their teaming, they felt increasingly isolated from the larger faculty.

Elizabeth summarized the impediments to change in an image that she had had for some time. "The whole environment, you know, is generally not conducive to change. The image I have is that we — my team and my students — are all standing on the starting line of a new kind of event, and we're waiting for someone to fire the gun; my fear is that we're going to go on like this for years — at the starting line waiting for someone to tell us to really take off. We know a lot and we've been practicing hard, but no one ever gives the signal. The event never really starts."

The Motivation to Continue

On the one hand, there were circumstances and people in Elizabeth's school which helped to orchestrate the change she underwent to become a teacher-as-coach. On the other hand, there were several major impediments that worked against change. In the midst of these conflicting forces, Elizabeth and her colleagues had remained constant in one thing: they were unwilling to quit or to revert to past practices. Sitting around tables in Elizabeth's classroom at the end of their mutual planning time, they often explored what it was that fueled their commitment, what made them wish to keep going in spite of the impediments.

Elizabeth was very clear about the primary source of motivation. "The response of my students has helped me more than anything to know that I am on the right track. They come in eager to solve problems, they grow in curiosity. They work harder and are much more engaged."

Another motivation for Elizabeth was the expansion of her own knowledge and understanding. "I've thought more about who we educate and why. I've thought more about schedules and the use of time and the organization of time. I've thought more about materials, what's quality and what's not. In fact, in a sense, I value my colleagues who are working in traditional circumstances more because I realize that we're all struggling to do what's best for our students. I feel that I understand more clearly the difficulties they face because they have five classes, thirty students a period, one hundred and fifty students a day. I think I value them more now."

Peter Daley reflected on what motivated him. "Well, I don't think we've reached nirvana or anything yet, but it seems to be working one heck of a lot better. I have always had this idea, Daley's Law: the more you give teachers to do, the less they give students to do. If you've got a hundred and fifty students, you're obviously not going to give them an essay to write every other day because you don't have the time to grade all those papers and, as a result, school is reduced to a ritual — the worksheet, the textbook, the short-answer test; learning is reduced to a formula or a regimen. Both teachers and students suffer from this kind of circumstance, and we all know that it might be easier but it certainly is more boring. I like being able to reverse Daley's Law."

A member of the second team, Betty Dolman, listed the things that motivated her in rapid-fire succession: "I like to generate mini-Exhibitions. I like to try to come up with things that connect various disciplines. I love being able to follow students through for more than one year. I like watching those youngsters come in small, because I get to watch them grow and improve and launch out there. I like coming up with essential questions.[12] I've enjoyed watching the kids become much more involved in their mini-Exhibitions. I see them getting excited as they're preparing something, and I see other youngsters come over and admire what they're doing and I can see them spill with pride."

Elizabeth agreed. "I think the difference in the mini-Exhibitions is that students have real choices and have the opportunity to become involved in deep analysis, higher-order thinking skills. They have to evaluate and synthesize, and I think they're thrilled to discover that that's part of the learning process in school."

All of them claimed that they continued to be motivated by their team relationships. They felt less isolated and more professional in that they were able to consult and provide better support to their students. They felt that they were better able to grow personally when provided the opportunity to work collaboratively.

Another motivator for all of them came in the form of frequent requests to make presentations to other teachers. Elizabeth and Betty had driven

quite a distance to make a forty-minute presentation entitled "Teacher as Generalist: Out on a Limb." While Elizabeth thought the session was a disaster — a "three-aspirin" session — she and Betty caught the irony. They had tried to present a very complex topic in forty minutes. It was just like their old teaching circumstance, which had caused similar problems. As a result, they learned again about the importance of adequate instructional time. Despite their harsh personal evaluation of the session, the presentation provided them with the opportunity to connect to another interdisciplinary team which had been newly formed. These new teachers, from a different part of their state, asked as many questions as they could squeeze into the breaks and on the walks to and from lunch during the course of the day. The new team kept referring to the two veterans, Elizabeth and Betty, as their "mentors" and were hopeful that they might make a reciprocal visit soon.

The benefits of these speaking engagements were substantial. The team members were forced to examine their own practice and evaluate the pros and cons. They were forced to organize their own materials so that others might be able to use them. They gained valuable insights from the comments and suggestions of participants, and they learned new strategies and solutions from the efforts of others.

Perhaps the strongest motivating force for Elizabeth and her colleagues was their sense of the possibilities. They all felt that they were really just beginning in this work, but the vision they shared of what could be if they all just kept going, kept pushing, was very compelling. Sally Watkins started to describe their vision: "In the best of all possible worlds, every child would belong to some unit or family group in school. Teachers would all be teamed, in threes at least, throughout the whole system so that they could enjoy and grow from those relationships. Parents would be thrilled at the progress their children were making and the kids would decide that they didn't need to have jobs to pay for cars, because they would be doing work which they believed was important —"

Peter interrupted her to say that the class load might be even smaller, which would allow teachers to find more real-world connections for kids in their school work. Tom Whitman added the hope that the curriculum would be built as a real continuum. "We would continue what we started on the first day and connect it up throughout the whole year, and then on to the next. The mini-Exhibitions and experiments would build one on another so that there was a progression. While teachers are led to believe that this is the way, the textbooks are terribly repetitive and don't provide kids with the kind of depth that can hold their interest. They repeat a lot of stuff, year after year after year. We wouldn't do that."

Elaine Martinson chimed in to say that student teachers would be able to work with a team during their student teaching, which would really expand their exposure to more teachers and teaching styles.

"Let me sum up all this dreaming," said Elizabeth, eyes flashing, her face reflecting both teasing and conviction. "We will not be a comprehensive high school. We'll be a total Essential school. And the quality of our students' capabilities and the work they do in their final Exhibitions will convince others to join us. We'll be off the starting blocks — way down the track. The only uneasiness I'll be feeling then will be from worrying about what to wear on Katie's national news show. She's going to have her own weekly show, I just know it, and she'll do a special. It'll be on the improvement of American schools. I just hope I don't gain any more weight between now and then!" They all roared and cheered.

NOTES

[1] The Coalition of Essential Schools is a partnership between Brown University and some one hundred member schools across the country. The purpose of the partnership is to encourage schools to make student learning the central focus of schooling.

The work of the Coalition emerges from "A Study of High Schools," as reported in *Horace's Compromise* by Theodore R. Sizer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985). The nine Common Principles, presented in an appendix to the book, provide the focal point for the re-examination of secondary schooling. For the full text of the principles, see the inside back cover of this article.

[2] This case study was undertaken to explore the changes one teacher made as she attempted to improve the quality of educational experiences her students received in her classroom. The data were gathered during the 1989–90 school year. I shadowed Elizabeth for one week, interviewed her, her students, and her colleagues, and took extensive observational notes. In the process of writing the case, several additional interviews were conducted. Elizabeth and I worked together in the development of this study; she feels that it accurately reflects her understanding of the differences between a conventional teacher and a teacher-as-coach.

Because this paper seeks to reflect Elizabeth's perceptions, no analysis by the author is included here. For such an analysis, see Patricia A. Wasley, "Stirring the Chalkdust: Three Teachers in the Midst of Change," Studies on Teacher Change (Providence, RI: Brown University, Coalition of Essential Schools, 1990).

[3] Elizabeth believed that the term "conventional" best described her past teaching practices. "Conventional teaching" refers to a particular teaching stance that has had considerable attention throughout the history of schooling. The predominate image of a conventional teacher suggests that the teacher is the deliverer of knowledge and that students are empty vessels ready to be filled with important information. Good conventional teachers employ a number of teaching strategies, from Socratic dialogue to lecturing to devising activities in which students must demonstrate their comprehension.

It is important to note that there are both brilliant and dismal conventional teachers. Examples abound in familiar literature and contemporary films. Good conventional teachers are typified by Mr. Chips, Miss Brooks, Mrs. Zajac in *Among Schoolchildren*, or Robin Williams's role in the film *Dead Poets Society*. Examples of dismal conventional teachers can be found in the work of Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, and in such movies as *Teachers* or *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.

[4] Teacher-as-coach is referred to in principle #5. Teachers indicate that it accurately captures their role in the classroom as they attempt to make their students the workers. When students become seriously engaged in the work of learning, the teacher's role changes from one of deliverer-of-important-information to one involving more individual coaching. Like music teachers and athletic coaches, teacher-coaches work to equip students with the independent skills they need to solve thorny problems and to investigate areas of interest.

Good coaches use many of the strategies of conventional teachers and more besides, but they all develop a less central stance in the classroom. To illustrate: a teacher-coach provides students with a problem and then requires that the students work to solve it. While the students work, the teacher-coach watches and holds up a mirror so that students can consider their own actions, so that they learn to reflect in the midst of action. Teacher-coaches ask questions, rather than supplying answers; they function as provocateurs to students actively engaged in a learning situation (see also note 7).

[5] Elizabeth worked with four groups of students throughout the year. I chose to include her most difficult group for two reasons. First, almost every teacher I know has one class that is more challenging than the rest, and they are the most likely group to cause teachers to revert to old teaching behaviors. In addition, this group best demonstrated the difficulties students experience when asked to become "workers." They were unfamiliar with the kinds of tasks asked of them, they were unfamiliar with group work, and they were unaccustomed to dealing with choices in the classroom.

[6] "Learning to use their minds well" refers to principle #1. Hours of observation in conventional secondary schools around the country indicate that too many students are not required to use their minds well, if at all. They engage in rudimentary tasks: they copy facts, dates, and definitions off the board; they describe information contained in texts by answering questions at the end of the chapter; they fill in blanks on worksheets, using information given to them in lectures or textbooks. None of these tasks requires that students engage in any of the higher-order thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, or interpretation. Nor do they require that students learn the process of determining and then investigating a problem. To learn to use their minds well, students must be actively engaged in problem-solving, in making connections between the subject of study in schools and the outside world, in the analysis, synthesis, and imaginative re-creation of knowledge and experience.

[7] The metaphor of student-as-worker implies that knowledge cannot be handed over to the learner by the teacher, but rather must be constructed by the student. This process requires that students participate in the work of question formulation, inquiry, synthesis, and analysis, among a host of others. All classroom work should be conducted so as to equip students with those skills. In addition, all work should be undertaken with a larger performance or demonstration of competence in mind in order to avoid busy-work that leads nowhere.

[8] The reference to "Exhibitions" relates to principle #6, which challenges the traditional means by which students currently earn diplomas through the accumulation of Carnegie units. Principle #6 states that diplomas should be awarded upon the successful demonstration of mastery, a student Exhibition. Such Exhibitions require that students engage in authentic activities and inquiries, that they rehearse and practice, that they be able to defend and explicate their work. In Elizabeth's school, teachers were experimenting with mini-Exhibitions, performances in which students learn to demonstrate mastery on a more limited or preliminary scale than the graduation Exhibition.

[9] Principle #3 indicates that the goals of the school should apply to each and every student. In Elizabeth's program, students were not tracked by ability levels as they were in the larger high school, but represented a heterogeneous sample.

[10] Newline High School is in a state that has joined Re:Learning, a partnership between the state, the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Education Commission of the States. As a condition of membership, the governor and the state department of education agre to facilitate changes in the policy arena that support school change according to the nine Common Principles.

[11] "Less is more" refers to principle #2, which suggests that students actually learn more when they cover less. The pressure to "cover content," to get through the text, encourages teachers to skim the surface of complex material so that students acquire a broad but disjointed, disconnected understanding rather than achieving mastery of a more limited number of skills and areas of information. By covering less, teachers enable students to engage in more thorough learning.

[12] Essential questions are an important part of rethinking the curriculum in Essential schools. Rather than organizing curriculum around right answers, essential questions become the centerpiece around which curriculum is built. An essential question does not have an obvious, single right answer and requires students to develop and use higher-order thinking skills and, frequently, collaborative group skills. For a fuller discussion, see Grant Wiggins, "Creating a Thought-provoking Curriculum," *American Educator*, Winter 1987.

THE COMMON PRINCIPLES
of the
Coalition of Essential Schools

1. The school should focus on helping adolescents learn to use their minds well. Schools should not attempt to be "comprehensive" if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose.

2. The school's goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program's design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that students need, rather than necessarily by "subjects" as conventionally defined. The aphorism "Less Is More" should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort merely to cover content.

3. The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of adolescents.

4. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than 80 students. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.

5. The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching, to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.

6. Students entering secondary school studies are those who can show competence in language and elementary mathematics. Students of traditional high school age but not yet at appropriate levels of competence to enter secondary school studies will be provided intensive remedial work to assist them quickly to meet these standards. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation — an "Exhibition." This Exhibition by the student of his or her grasp of the central skills and knowledge of the school's program may be jointly administered by the faculty and by higher authorities. As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school's program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of "credits earned" by "time spent" in class. The emphasis is on the students' demonstration that they can do important things.

7. The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation ("I won't threaten you but I expect much of you"), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school's particular students and teachers should be emphasized, and parents should be treated as essential collaborators.

8. The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.

9. Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include, in addition to total student loads per teacher of eighty or fewer pupils, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff and an ultimate per pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10 percent. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided students in many traditional comprehensive secondary schools.

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